

Why We Need Brightwater

As our population grows, we need a new wastewater treatment plant called Brightwater to protect our health, environment, and economic growth. It will be expensive, and it will have impacts, but we need to make a decision that our region can live with for 100 years or more.

Protecting a growing population

We treat wastewater to protect public health and the environment. As the population grows, we must add capacity to the system or we risk sewage overflows and restrictions on our ability to grow throughout the region. These consequences could devastate our economy. It takes at least 10 years to site and build a treatment plant, so we must plan ahead for the long term. Ultimately, the plant will serve the region for 100 years and beyond.

Population projections demonstrate need

As our population grows, King County's wastewater treatment system will run out of capacity in 2010. Population projections are developed by the Puget Sound Regional Council and used by governments and utilities throughout the region to do their long-range planning. We review new estimates when they are updated. In addition to growth in the general population, we need to plan for new wastewater customers as households currently on septic systems hook up to the sewer system. Wastewater facilities are planned for the long term. Historically, short-term changes in the local economy such as the Boeing bust in the '70s and a recession in California in the early '90s followed by the technology boom have had little impact on the long-term growth projections.

Running out of capacity – preserving the capacity we have

Initially, the first place we will run out of capacity is in our conveyance pipelines at the north end of Lake Washington, which could lead to sewage overflows in that area. We will need more capacity at our treatment plants shortly after that. While we are currently constructing a 6 million-gallon storage facility in Bothell to prevent overflows, it is not enough without more treatment capacity.

We are beginning 10 pilot projects to fix improper connections and leaks – most in local or privately owned pipes – that allow storm water and groundwater to enter the system. If successful, this program may help us postpone expanding Brightwater, but it won't prevent us from needing it in 2010.

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Why We Need Brightwater, page 2

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Water conservation is important for a lot of reasons, but it does little to reduce the need for wastewater systems, which are sized for wet weather conditions when water conservation has the least impact. Water conservation does nothing to reduce the amount of solids that we need to treat.

Getting the most for our money

The current estimate for the cost of the preferred Brightwater system is \$1.40 billion. Growth will pay for growth — most of the cost will come from the rates and hook-up fees paid by new customers to the system. Current ratepayers will see modest rate impacts over the long term.

We are looking at ways to reduce the cost of the project including:

- Phasing facilities in as needed to respond to changes in growth patterns
- Reducing the number of portals needed in the conveyance system
- Seeking grants and low-interest loans

We are also involving employees in finding ways to reduce the cost of treating wastewater throughout our system.

We need to build Brightwater now. It is an investment in our future that we can't afford not to make.

For more information or to be added to our mailing list, please contact:

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This information is available in alternative formats upon request by calling 206-684-1280 or Relay Service 711

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